

Exploring Geography Through African History

Lesson Video: Grades 6-8

Overview

Teacher: Lisa Farrow
Grade: 7
School: Shiloh Middle School
Location: Hampstead, Maryland

NCSS Standards-Based Themes: Culture; Time, Continuity, and Change; People, Places, and Environments; Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Content Standards: Geography, History, Economics

Video Summary

How do you teach students about a world region as large and as culturally diverse as the continent of Africa? Seventh-grade teacher Lisa Farrow begins by focusing on the roles that geography and economics have played in shaping Africa's history.

On the first day of this two-day lesson, Ms. Farrow gives each pair of students an envelope that contains thematic maps of Africa (one map, for example, shows migration routes and the spread of Islam), titles of events in African history, and descriptions of those events. Students match up each title and description on a map and assemble the maps in order by time period. They then use colored pencils to draw a timeline that shows the order and duration of the major time periods represented by the maps. They finish by using their timelines to answer questions on a worksheet.

On the second day, students research one of the three main trading empires (East Africa, West Africa, and Somalia) using a "multi-text" approach, which incorporates different types of textbooks into the research. They make posters that include the most important information about each empire, such as the extent of the empire, the location of its trading routes, and the dominant language. After presenting the posters to the rest of the class, students compare the empires and discuss why some were larger and lasted longer than others.

(This lesson was adapted from material provided by the Teachers' Curriculum Institute, creators of *History Alive* and *Social Studies Alive*.)

Standards

Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each educational level. This lesson correlates to the following standards for middle school students:

I. Culture

Compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns; explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference; explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.

Standards, cont'd.

II. Time, Continuity, and Change

Identify and use key concepts such as chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity; identify and describe selected historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as the rise of civilizations, the development of transportation systems, the growth and breakdown of colonial systems, and others; identify and use processes important to reconstructing and reinterpreting the past, such as using a variety of sources, providing, validating, and weighing evidence for claims, checking credibility of sources, and searching for causality; develop critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attitudes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts.

III. People, Places, and Environments

Create, interpret, use, and distinguish various representations of the Earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs; examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes; describe ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings; observe and speculate about social and economic effects of environmental changes and crises resulting from phenomena such as floods, storms, and drought.

VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Describe the role that supply and demand, prices, incentives, and profits play in determining what is produced and distributed in a competitive market system; describe the role of specialization and exchange in the economic process; use economic concepts to help explain historical and current developments and issues in local, national, or global contexts.

Content Standards: Geography, History, Economics

About the Class

Classroom Profile

"I feel it is important to teach social studies because students learn information that they can apply to their lives. You hear students say, 'What does this have to do with my life?' But there are a lot of very important decisions that they're going to have to make in the future, and it is important to see the mistakes and successes of people from the past to make decisions in the future." —Lisa Farrow

Year at a Glance
Oceania
The Middle East
African History and Geography
Asia
Five Themes of Geography

Lisa Farrow teaches seventh-grade social studies at the new Shiloh Middle School in Hampstead, Maryland. A rural, bedroom community on the outskirts of Baltimore, Hampstead is home to a socio-economically and ethnically diverse population that supports a wide range of businesses in and around Baltimore. One of the largest local employers is the Social Security headquarters. Hampstead also has the highest percentage of two-parent families in Maryland, and Shiloh Middle School relies on strong parent involvement.

About the Class, cont'd.

Throughout the year, Ms. Farrow's class studied Eastern cultures, including those of Oceania, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Ms. Farrow began with a unit on Oceania—the Eastern region closest to the United States. (Oceania is the collective name given to the islands of the western, central, and southern Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand.) The unit focused on the relationship between the region's geography and its social, political, and economic history. This relationship between geography and culture was an ongoing theme throughout the year as students explored other regions and cultures.

Next, the class studied the Middle East—its geography, cultural traditions, and the role of religion in the region. By the time the class began the unit on Africa, Ms. Farrow expected students to be able to recognize the importance of geography to a region's history. And she expected them to be familiar with the multi-text approach, which involves using a variety of reference resources with in-depth group work and group presentations. Ms. Farrow also used hands-on activities, simulations, and readings to facilitate discussions about stereotyping and ethnocentrism.

Throughout the unit on Africa—and throughout the year—Ms. Farrow integrated map skills, the five themes of geography (location, place, movement, human-environment interaction, and region), and examined the differences between natural and human-made features in each region. Students also learned about the economic and historical factors affecting migration.

Following the unit on Africa, the class went on to study Asia. By the end of the year, students had covered all four Eastern regions, with each unit's research culminating in a final class presentation on the geography and culture of that region.

Lesson Background

Read this information to better understand the lesson shown in the video.

Content: A Brief Overview of African History

Africa is the second largest continent in the world; its 53 countries make up one-fifth of the Earth's landmass. Africa's wildlife, climate, and economy are affected by the equator, which runs through the middle of the continent. Africa is surrounded by water and, until the natural formation of the Suez Canal, it was connected to Asia. Its notable land features include Mt. Kilimanjaro, Lake Victoria, Serengeti National Park, the Sahara Desert, and the Nile River. Africa is known for its diverse animal kingdom, including elephants, lions, zebras, antelopes, and chimpanzees, and its natural resources, such as gold and diamonds.

The following historical periods and events were highlighted in the lesson.

Bantu Migrations (c. 500 B.C.–A.D. 1500): The Bantu people are believed to have originated in Cameroon. About 500 B.C., the Bantu left an area around the Benue River, a tributary of the Niger River, and moved into the Congo Basin. Migrations of Bantu-speaking people, the largest migrations in history, took these people and their iron-based technology east and south of the rain forest regions near the equator. The Bantu established kingdoms in eastern, central, and southern Africa. Bantu groups in southeastern Africa established the **Mwene Mutapa Empire**, known to the Europeans as the Monomotapa Empire, with its spectacular buildings at Great Zimbabwe. Muslim culture was brought to eastern Africa through trade between the Bantu groups and the Middle East. As their population grew, the Bantu people, who were excellent farmers, moved south and east. The Sahara Desert in the north deterred them moving there.

Spread of Islam (c. 650–1000): Muslim refugees from the Arab Peninsula first introduced Islam to the African people early in the seventh century. Islam spread into North, West, and East Africa, where it met and often mixed with the native African cultures. Around 800 A.D., camel caravans began crossing the Sahara. These Muslim traders brought salt and other goods, such as horses, cloth, and swords, from the Mediterranean region to the rulers of Ghana who, in return, supplied gold and ivory. Around the year 1050, Muslim Arabs also crossed the Red Sea and annexed the Somali coast from the established Christian kingdom of Ethiopia.

West African Trading Empires (c. 800–1600): The camel made travel through the Sahara possible, and with travel came trade. In particular, gold, salt, and agricultural products were traded between kingdoms north of the Sahara

About the Class, cont'd.

and the kingdom of Ghana to the southwest. Ghana was a powerful empire built on trade. Ghana was succeeded in the 1200s by the empire of Mali, which was ruled by Muslims. The kingdom of Songhai emerged from Mali and expanded northeast along the Niger River to the important trading city and religious center of Timbuktu. These trading empires allowed Muslim traders to interact and exchange ideas with Africans and were largely responsible for the spread of Islam throughout Africa.

Swahili Trading States (c. 1200–1500): Swahili is an Arabic word that means “coastal area.” The Swahili city-states along East Africa’s coast were established in the thirteenth century by Arab settlers as trading towns. They traded with the Middle East for glass, pearls, and fabric, and with Asian centers such as China for silk and porcelain. They also traded tortoiseshell, ivory, ebony, and spices in exchange for rugs from Persia; spices, rice, cotton, and cloth from India; and ceramics, cloth, weapons, and glass from Arabia. Swahili is the name of the language that developed out of contact between Bantu-speaking Africans and Arab traders.

Turkish Empire (c. 1450–1922): The Turkish Empire, also called the Ottoman Empire, extended the influence of the Muslim faith in North Africa during the sixteenth century by conquering many northern African city-states, including Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and Egypt. Ottoman traders brought gold and salt to this region and returned with metal-ware, cloth, horses, and glass. The empire reached its peak in the seventeenth century and officially ended at the conclusion of World War I.

Slave Trade (c. 1500–1880s): In the sixteenth century, Europeans found that the most profitable trade was not in gold, ivory, and commodities, but in humans from West Africa. Africans were sold into slavery to work on thriving plantations in the Americas. Slave trade to the Americas persisted for almost 300 years, and by the eighteenth century, more than 20 million Africans had already been captured and traded as slaves.

European Colonialism (1880s–1960s): During this period, often called the Age of Imperialism, many European nations claimed territory and established colonial rule in Africa. Colonies were usually developed for economic reasons: European nations wanted Africa’s raw materials and also wanted to create new markets for their manufactured goods. Spain, Italy, the Ottoman Empire, the Boer (Dutch), Germany, Belgium, Portugal, France, and Great Britain all had colonies in Africa.

Independence of Many African Nations (1957 to the present): Colonial rule in Africa was characterized by segregation and racial prejudice. Not surprisingly, it was met with uprisings and rebellions on the part of many native Africans. In 1953, after signing an agreement with Great Britain, its former mother country, Sudanese parliamentary candidates won a clear majority and established an independent government. In a peaceful turnover of power in 1954, Sudan became the first African nation to win its independence. Within the next 10 years, colonial rule ended in nearly all of the remaining colonies.

Teaching Strategy: Using a Multi-Text Approach

The multi-text approach involves using several resources as research tools: a variety of textbooks, atlases, travel guides or other books, or a media-rich library. The multi-text approach allows teachers greater flexibility in teaching or introducing a topic, and can be especially useful in lessons that focus on broad topics, such as African history and geography. Because history, literature, or science texts can be excellent resources for teaching about geography and culture, for example, the multi-text approach is an effective strategy for an integrated curriculum. It also lets students approach even a difficult topic through a familiar lens (i.e., learning about a culture by tracing its history or geography) and often helps them to engage with content at a deeper level because they have more freedom in choosing texts. Finally, the multi-text approach lets teachers provide a range of tools for different levels of learners.

Watching the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- How do you approach a subject as general as world cultures?
- How would you narrow the focus of a topic as broad and complex as Africa?
- How might you integrate the study of Africa's geography, history, and culture?
- What are the key unifying themes or questions you would formulate in preparing a unit on Africa?
- What background knowledge do students need before beginning a unit on Africa?

Watch the Video

As you watch "Exploring Geography Through African History," take notes on Ms. Farrow's instructional strategies, particularly how she supports student inquiry. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Reflecting on the Video

Review your notes, then respond to the following questions:

- What struck you about the classroom climate, background, preparation, strategies, and materials used in this lesson?
- How did Ms. Farrow help students use their prior experience with timelines to understand African history?
- What were Ms. Farrow's goals for this lesson?
- Which of the strategies used by Ms. Farrow were especially effective in accomplishing the goals for this lesson?
- How did Ms. Farrow structure the learning experiences to ensure success on the part of all students?
- How did Ms. Farrow encourage students to make use of multiple types of resources?

Watching the Video, cont'd.

Looking Closer

Here's an opportunity to take a closer look at interesting aspects of Ms. Farrow's lesson.



Building Background Through Inquiry: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately five minutes into the video. Watch for about six minutes.

Ms. Farrow has given the students maps, titles, and descriptions of events to match up. Students are using clues to determine which pieces of information belong together.

- How does group work facilitate a better understanding of the topic?
- What does the student comment near the end of this clip reveal about students' perceptions of what was learned in this lesson?
- How does this lesson address Ms. Farrow's overall learning objectives for students in their study of Africa and geography?



Using Timelines To Extend Learning: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately 13 minutes into the video. Watch for about three minutes.

Ms. Farrow has asked students to work in pairs to develop timelines that show the duration of key periods in African history. Students then use their timelines to answer questions.

- What are students learning as they use the timelines to answer additional questions?
- What kinds of connections can students make by doing this activity?
- Which skills are developed by the activities in this lesson?
- How might this activity be reconfigured for a student who has difficulty organizing timelines?

Connecting to Your Teaching

Reflecting on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- How would you develop a lesson to make African history accessible to your students?
- How do you organize complex topics into manageable subtopics?
- What are some specific strategies you use to teach students to interpret data and make connections between the data and what they are learning?
- How do you uncover and correct student misconceptions when teaching about world regions and other cultures?
- How might you use the multi-text approach in your curriculum?

Taking It Back to Your Classroom

- To get a more objective idea of the history and culture of a foreign country, it is useful to consider the perspective of people native to that country. For example, have students research the colonial period in African history, using sources written from an African as well as a Western perspective. Ask students to use at least two sources from each perspective, and to compare accounts. Ask students to explain why there are different interpretations of the same event.
- Ask students to categorize information about African history to share with others: for example, important events that occurred in different parts of Africa during the same historical period.
- Ask students to research one key era in African history, and give them a choice as to how they present their findings (for example, by writing a summary or giving a presentation).
- After studying several aspects of African history, have a class debate about a recent issue that links history and geography (for example, should reparations be given to the ancestors of slaves in the United States?).
- After using different types of resources to research one area of the world, ask students to create a similar set of resources related to another region or historical period.

Resources

Print Resources for Students

Chu, Daniel, and Elliott Skinner. *A Glorious Age in Africa: The Story of Three Great African Empires*. AWP Young Readers Series. Lawrenceville, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1992.

McKissack, Patricia, and Fredrick McKissack. *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1994.

Print Resources for Teachers

Clark, Leon E. *The Past: The Road to Independence*. Vol. 1 of *Through African Eyes*. New York: Center for International Training and Education, 1991.

Clark, Leon E. *The Past: The Road to Independence*. Vol. 1 of *Through African Eyes: Teaching Strategies*. New York: Center for International Training and Education, 1989.

Hamilton, Robert E. *Lesson Plans on African History and Geography: A Teaching Resource*. Gainesville, Fla.: Center for African Studies, 1992.

Web Resources for Students

Africa Online: <http://www.africaonline.com/site/africa/kids.jsp>

Africa Online's Kids Only site offers information on Africa through online games, maps, and interactive links.

All Africa: <http://www.allafrica.com>

This comprehensive site delivers multilingual current events, statistics, and country-by-country headlines.

National Geographic: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/africa>

National Geographic for Kids features maps, photos, online tours, and downloads on Africa.

Web Resources for Teachers

Africa Access: <http://www.africaaccessreview.org>

This site focuses on resource material about Africa, such as children's literature and scholarly reviews.

African Studies Center at Boston University: <http://bu.edu/africa/outreach>

BU's Outreach program is an interdisciplinary teaching and research center that provides educators with information and materials on Africa.

H-Afrteach: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~afrteach>

The H-Net Afrteach is a forum and resource center for K-12 African studies educators.

Notes
